





**WORLD WAR II'S RETURNING GIS IGNITED
THE BABY BOOM, BURNED THE MIDNIGHT OIL
STUDYING AND TORCHED AT LEAST ONE
CAMPUS TRADITION.**

HOME FIRES

BY SUE SALZER

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE SPONTANEOUS events that defines an era, and it happened on Mizzou's White Campus one cold March morning in 1948. A group of agriculture students caught some other scholars walking on the grass in violation of Aggie protocol. As was their custom — for they were the unofficial groundskeepers of the White Campus in those days — the Aggies ran the violators through a

Opposite: Veterans returning to MU after serving in World War II settled down to raising families, as well as doing some serious studying.

PHOTO FROM 1947 SUFFLER

Above: The veterans' strategic attack on the Aggies' tradition of paddling brought it to a halt.

PHOTO FROM APRIL 1948, MISSOURI ALUMNIUS MAGAZINE

gauntlet-like paddle line.

Although it was something they'd done many times before, this time would be different. Most male students at Mizzou in 1948 were combat-hardened veterans who were here for a reason, and getting paddled wasn't it. By early afternoon, 400 to 500 men had assembled in front of Ellis Library.

"It was just time to put an end to all that nonsense. We marched on the building where they stored those paddles, grabbed 'em up and made a big bonfire, right there on their beloved White Campus," says Bill Claybourn, BS ChE '48.

Although the practice would return briefly in the 1950s, paddling was fin-

ished at Mizzou for the GI era.

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, brought more than 6 million World War II veterans to the nation's colleges from 1945 through 1950. Benefits included cost of tuition, books and fees plus a living allowance of \$75 to \$95 a month, depending on the number of GI dependents. The legislation, and the veterans' response to it, marked what some scholars call America's shift to a "knowledge society," a culture where education would be the primary resource for individuals and the economy as a whole.

"The GI Bill's great accomplishment was to open the doors of the learned professions to a wider range of people, those

who otherwise would not have had access," says political science Professor Herbert Tillema. "It was a grand experiment in social engineering, and some advocated it just for that purpose."

THE CRUSH

The bill's effect on MU was profound. Enrollment jumped 170 percent in one year, from 3,936 in fall 1945 to 10,593 in 1946. Almost 73 percent of those students were GIs.

The crush was overwhelming. Opening of the '46 fall term was delayed two weeks while administrators wrestled with logistics and workers scrambled to erect emergency living quarters for the GIs, many of whom had wives and children.

By 1950, the campus sprouted almost 300 khaki-colored government trailers, 90 prefabricated homes for faculty, 66 dormitories for single men, 58 barracks with two-room apartments for married students, three barracks for single women and five Quonset huts on Rollins Field, for married veteran athletes. Additional structures served as administrative buildings and classrooms. The trailer communities, especially, became cozy little settlements with names like GI City (on Sixth Street across from Parker Hospital), Fairway Village (at the corner of Maryland and Kentucky avenues) and Dairy Lawn (south of Sanborn Field on the College of Agriculture campus).

THE BEST IS NONE TOO GOOD

The look of the campus didn't impress Ralph J. Martin, BJ '41, who returned to his alma mater for a look-see after the war. The former *Stars and Stripes* correspondent described one of its trailer towns in his 1948 book, *The Best is None Too Good*:

"Big, shiny private trailers parked so close to small, warped ones that their radio programs seem to merge. A man mows a pitifully small lawn, only three steps each way. Flowers and vines and curtains try to color some of the drabness. The bottom covering of one trailer is so torn that you can see water dripping down from the icebox into a smelly, stagnant puddle crowded with flies. Mothers



Care to "struggle" at Gabler's Black and Gold Inn, next to the Shack? The returning GIs obviously did.

yell for their kids. The stink of the garbage shed, overflowing cans, more flies. A dirty boy carries a big pail of water to his trailer."

But those who actually lived there don't remember it that way. Not Jane Scarbrough Peterson, BJ '45, who returned to Mizzou in 1947 with her new husband, John, BS EE '50.

"A couple of John's Army buddies found us this horrible, horrible basement apartment," Jane recalls and laughs at the memory. "My mother had a fit when she saw it." The newlyweds lived there a couple of months until Jane secured a graduate assistant job in the School of Journalism. The job was their ticket to better housing in Stadium Court, an area reserved for faculty. They felt themselves fortunate, indeed.

"We were very, very lucky, compared to what some people were living in. We had two bedrooms, a living room, a bath

and a little kitchen. We paid \$32 a month, and an extra dollar because we had an electric refrigerator instead of an icebox." They were allowed to remain even after Peterson left her job following the birth of her first child, born in June 1949 in Noyes Hospital, now Parker Hall. Those married students helped spawn the Baby Boom, 1946 to 1964.

"I had to quit. In those days if you were a mom, you didn't work. We were living on the \$90 a month John got from the GI Bill. We were poor, but those were happy, happy times."

An evening's entertainment would involve getting together with other married couples. "If someone brought a six-pack, that was a big deal," Peterson recalls. "Sometimes we'd play bridge, but mostly we'd eat chips, drink Cokes and talk. Those times were about companionship, fun and friendship."

John and Jane later divorced; she now



PHOTO FROM 1945 Section

lives in Sarasota, Fla.

Life was perhaps less comfortable in student housing. Pneumonia Gulch was the sobriquet for the single-student dormitories north of Stadium Boulevard and east of Maryland Avenue while the group of barracks across College from Sanborn Field was called Blue Campus.

"We called it that because the barracks were so cold and windy, blue was the color of your skin lots of times, especially when you were taking a shower," says Robert Buzbee, BJ '49, a current resident of Mentor, Ohio.

The barracks for unmarried men were long, single-story structures with a hall running the length in the center and rooms on either side. They lived four to a room, sharing bath and shower facilities in the center of the building. "It really wasn't all that bad," Buzbee says. "It was better than camping out at night like many of us were used to."

JELLYING AT THE JOINTS

J.K. "Ken" Cowdery, BS ME '48, of Mansfield, Ohio, had two years at Mizzou under his belt when he enlisted in the Army in 1941. Upon returning to campus after the war, he found himself in the single men's barracks, sharing space with three other guys. Campus life was different.

"Before the war, most guys didn't have a steady girl. We chased women and drank beer. Nobody had a car, so we'd hang out at places near campus. Hanging out was called 'jellying' back then — don't ask me the derivation — and the places were 'jelly joints.'"

Harris's, near the Hall Theater on Ninth Street, was a jelly joint, and the legendary Jack's Shack was popular. But Gaebler's Black and Gold Inn, neighbor to the Shack, was Cowdery's favorite.

"Sundays at Gaebler's you'd get a big steak, a T-bone that filled your whole plate, two vegetables on the side and Black and Gold Pie — graham cracker crust, yellow custard, a chocolate layer and meringue. That whole meal for 50 cents."

One Saturday afternoon Harry James made an unscheduled appearance at Gaebler's, sitting in with the house band. Word spread like wildfire.

"Gaeb' lost money that day," Cowdery recalls. "The place was so packed the waiters couldn't get around to take orders and serve food."

But after '45, fellows didn't seem to jelly at the joints the way they used to.

"Before the war, nobody had much. We were just coming out of the Depression. Now, we were reasonably affluent. Most of us saved our money during the war — where would we spend it? — and a lot of the guys had wives who were working. Plus, we were getting \$90 a month on the GI Bill. Most of us had cars so we'd take our dates to these BYOB places that had opened up along the highway. Liquor by the drink wasn't sold in Columbia then. Beer was sold — and that was OK — but after the war most guys were accustomed to spirits."

Though many GI students never graduated, enough of them did to change the demographics of America. About 6 per-

cent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 29 had college degrees in 1940. By 1952, that percentage had jumped to 10.4.

The GI Bill's beneficiaries at this time were almost exclusively male. "In a sense, the bill rigidified male chauvinism," political science Professor Tillema says. "Women accounted for less than 10 percent of the armed services during World War II. If you worked in a factory all day to support the war, as many women did, you weren't entitled to the GI Bill."

And, at MU, its beneficiaries were almost exclusively white. Although GI benefits were extended to black veterans, the University struggled with desegregation issues throughout the '40s and was not fully integrated until after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1955.

Despite these inequities, the GI Bill is almost universally regarded as an enlightened and salutary law.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Kee Groshong, BS BA '64, agrees. "We were changed not just in terms of enrollment, but attitudes," says the vice chancellor for administrative services. "Before the war, most people didn't go to Europe or Asia. The GIs came back with a better perspective of their place in the world. Their horizons were greatly expanded. And, for whatever reason, they placed a much higher value on education." But as Groshong notes, MU is a very different kind of place now.

All but one of the temporary buildings are gone. The lone survivor is the Veterinary Science Building, a converted airplane hangar just east of Connaway Hall. The private rooming houses are gone, as is the business district south of Jesse Hall that included Gaebler's Black and Gold, The Shack, the Trolley Car Diner and the grocery.

But friendships and warm memories remain. "The war had a lot to do with it," says Len Cobey, BJ '42, of Highland Park, Ill. "We were all wondering whether we'd ever come back or not. Somehow, everything became much more important to us, including our feelings for one another and the school."